Shell

1. **Interpretation.** Affirmatives must defend just governments in general and must not defend that only a single government or combination of governments implement a living wage.
2. **Violation:**
3. **Standards**
4. **Textuality –** 
   1. **Grammar** – ‘just governments’ in the resolution is a generic bare plural. Nebel[[1]](#footnote-1)

I believe that debaters shouldn’t specify a government on the living wage topic. The standard argument for this is simple: “just governments” is a plural noun phrase, so it refers to more than one just government. Most debaters will stop there. But there is much more to say. (Some seem not to care about the plural construction. I plan to address this view in a later article about the parametric conception of topicality.) Some noun phrases include articles like “the,” demonstratives like “these,” possessives like “my,” or quantifiers like “some” or “all.” These words are called determiners. Bare plurals, including “just governments,” lack determiners. There’s no article, demonstrative, possessive, or quantifier in front of the noun to tell you how many or which governments are being discussed. We use bare plurals for two main purposes. Consider some examples: Debaters are here. Debaters are smart. In (1), “debaters” seems equivalent to “some debaters.” It is true just in case there is more than one debater around. If I enter a restaurant and utter (1), I speak truly if there are a couple of debaters at a table. This is an existential use of the bare plural, because it just says that there exist things of the relevant class (debaters) that meet the relevant description (being here). In (2), though, “debaters” seems to refer to debaters in general. This use of the bare plural is generic. Some say that generics refer to kinds of things, rather than particular members of their kinds, or that they refer to typical cases. There is a large literature on understanding generics. Here my aim is not to figure out the truth conditions for the generic reading of the resolution; I shall simply work with our pre-theoretical grip on the contrast between sentences like (1) and (2). This distinction bears importantly on the resolution. If “just governments” is a generic bare plural, then the debate is about whether just governments in general ought to require that employers pay a living wage. If it is an existential bare plural, then the debate is about whether some just governments—i.e., more than one—ought to require that employers pay a living wage. Only the second interpretation allows one to affirm by specifying a few governments.

Grammer key to accurate reading of the text because it explains the proper way to read the text.

* 1. **Common usage** – the generic interpretation is the only one consistent with common usage. Nebel 2

To my ear, the generic reading is correct. I think the best evidence for this is simply the undistorted judgments of ordinary speakers. **No competent speaker** of English **would,** without distorting influence or additional evidence of generalizability, **endorse an inference from a plan involving two just governments to the resolution. Suppose Sally**, an American citizen, **believes that the U.S. and Canada should require** employers to pay **a living wage, but** that **no other government** (just or unjust, actual or possible) **should. She would not represent her view by asserting, “Just governments ought to require that employers pay a living wage.”** She would deny this claim and hold that the U.S. and Canada are exceptions. One might object that Sally would endorse this assertion if she believed that the U.S. and Canada are the only just governments. Maybe she would, but that is explained by the generic reading, because she would then be making a generalization about (what she believes to be) just governments. And the onus would be on the affirmative, when specifying particular governments, to add such a premise. Moreover, many linguists would add that Sally could not regard it is as mere accident that these governments are just and that they ought to require employers to pay a living wage: the resolution requires there to be some explanatory connection between the justness of governments and the living wage requirement (Carlson 2005, see). This is good evidence because **ordinary speakers have an implicit** (but not infallible**) mastery over the language in which the resolution is stated.** The resolution is stated in English, not in some special debate-specific dialect of English. Facts of usage constrain interpretation. The existential interpretation is not even, as I see it, eligible. So its pragmatic benefits are irrelevant. Compare: I think it would be better if the resolution were, “It is not the case that just governments ought to …” But that’s not the resolution, so it’s not even an eligible interpretation in a T debate. (Here I assume a controversial view about whether pragmatic benefits can justify a semantically inadequate interpretation of the resolution. I cannot defend this view here, but I welcome questions and objections in the comments to be addressed in a later article.)

Common usage key to textuality because words only acquire meaning by how they are used. Granting any standard priority over textuality is a blank check to ignore the resolution and would lead to a massive proliferation of unpredictable strategies and theory/T. Predictability key to reciprocal offensive engagement of positions.

Textuality is also key to jurisdiction as the judge cannot vote on a non-topical case – the NFL-mandated topic is analogous to mandated speech times. The judge should uphold debating the topic just as much as they would only evaluating arguments within speeches.

**2. Predictability** – There are thousands of advocacies and solvency advocates in the lit, making it near impossible to predict the affirmative. Even if there’s a lot of lit on a specific country, that’s non-unique to most aff advocacies so I still couldn’t predict it.

The abuse is magnified by further specification within countries – ie. To sectors and cities, so even if I can predict which country will be defended I’ll have no way to know what advocacy the aff will read.

Disclosure doesn’t check back because a) I only look at it 30 minutes before the round and not when I am doing my relevant prep and b) people break new at toc – its unproductive to spend my time prepping cases already broken. Predictability is key to fairness since it’s key to generate reciprocal evidence and access the ballot

**3. Limits** – Even if your aff is predictable, your interp is severely underlimited. Supercharged on this topic because there are 200+ countries the aff can defend, the aff can spec to defend living wage for specific sectors such as healthcare, aviation, manufacturing etc, and the aff can defend specific ordinances, such as San Francisco. There are thousands of specific affs that are permissible if we don’t accept my interp, generating an infinite caselist. Thus it’s impossible to prep for every possible advocacy even if I know in advance what you will read. Limits are key to fairness since we can’t prep for a thousand affs. Also the interp coopts all benefits from the counterinterp because I still allow there to be specific debates on whatever aff you think is useful, I just don’t limit the debate SOLELY to that.

D. Fairness

AT - Leslie

1. Nebel outweighs on specificity – my definition is talking about the direct terms in the resolution, specifically “just governments.” Prefer direct semantic analysis of the topic by a qualified source – their evidence requires extrapolation to the resolution. We’re not qualified to make or criticize that extrapolation without expertise in semantics, so prefer my evidence.
2. Nebel’s warrants his interpretation with the ‘common sense english test’ – arguing that it would be incoherent for an average English speaker talking about the benefits of a particular country paying a living wage to rephrase their statement as ‘just governments ought pay a living wage’. The common sense english test is the warrant most suitable for LD since debaters are not trained linguists and will act on the common sense speaking of the topic.
3. Leslie agrees with my interp. The mosquito example doesn’t apply – the resolution is a ‘’characteristic” rather than a “striking” generic. Leslie[[2]](#footnote-2) explains the distinction:

Leslie further argues that, once we understand the role that generics play in our psychology, we can develop an account of when generics are true and false. Leslie divides generics into three categories: characteristic (including items such as “ducks lay eggs”), majority (e.g. “cars have radios”) and striking/dangerous (e.g. “mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus”). These different classes have different requirements that the world must meet for the corresponding generic to be true. Cimpian, Brandone and Gelman (2010) report empirical results that support Leslie’s thesis that these particular factors differentially impact adults’ willingness to accept generic statements (e.g. adults accept generics at lower prevalence levels if the property in question is strikingly dangerous)

And this is empirically verified – LD topics are phrased as normative propositions & general rules. Leslie 2[[3]](#footnote-3) explains that we do not evaluate a generic quantitatively:

Finally, we accept “mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus”, even though fewer than one percfent of mosquitoes carry the virus, while also rejecting “books are paperbacks”, when over eighty percent of books are paperbacks. The correct analysis of the truth conditions for generics is a matter of great controversy among theorists working on the problem

1. TURN: you proving a specific instance of a general statement doesn’t mean the general statement is true. This is entirely the problem of inductive logic. Your aff just means one situation of the resolution is true, not that all situations are true. The point is that you have to defend all situations.
2. TURN: Leslie’s own example explains why your counter-interp is not grammatical. The resolution is presented as a plural form, i.e. we talk about governments with an “s” at the end of it. Your aff requires talking about a specific instance.

AT - Disclosure

1. Disclosing a non-topical position doesn’t change how topical it is. It may be disclosed its still unfair and outside your jurisdiction to vote on.
2. Disclosure doesn’t solve under competing interpretations – if disclosure checks back the abuse of being non-topical, then so long as a debater disclosed their non topical position negatives would be forced to engage it. This is intuitively ridiculous. and would lead to unfair debate devoid of clash - affs would have a perverse incentive to evade neg prep and constantly break new non topical affs. negs would have a limitless research burden, incentivizing them to respond with extremely generic cases (like skepticism) and procedural uplayering. debate would be overrun by skewed strategies and devoid of engagement.
3. Even if you disclose I’ll only check your wiki right before the round, so I won’t be able to make up the prep deficit.
4. Even if I can check the wiki in advance I wouldn’t have time to prep out every single plan on it or predict how you’ll read the advocacy in round.
5. Disclosure doesn’t check for ToC – people break new affs all the time so its inefficient to spend my time before the tournament prepping out already broken plans.

AT – Only Spec This Country

Overview – this only has a risk for solving the pragmatic benefits of my interp but it doesn’t solve textuality. (text outweighs/semantics first)

1. Turn – Creates a world of huge neg side bias because I’ll only have one advocacy to prep out while the aff has to prep for every possible neg position in response.
2. Turn – Destroys norm setting for the activity because people are incentivized to always respond to my interp with your CI – ie their country is ok but everywhere else is bad. This means that a) We can’t develop a set of fair advocacies and b) your counter interp doesn’t solve for the abuse because people won’t conform to it.
3. Turn – Your interp destroys topic education because it limits us to one country, meaning we are forced to focus on a minute portion of the lit and lose important discussion on other real world issues.
4. TURN: it’s telling that the only way to solve predictable limits is by overlimiting. If your solution to solving predictable limits is by letting the aff read only one AC, that AC was probably not predictable.
5. This helps in future debates but not in this debate. This is retroactive. It doesn’t change the fact that you already read your AC and the abuse has already occurred.

AT – You don’t Allow Plans

Framing:

* This argument comes from a misunderstanding of my interpretation. You can still have advocacies specifying a sector of the living wage, the living wage rate, etc, the only restriction is specifying governments. This means that my interp allows for plans and coopts all of your offense.

And Prefer plans under my interpretation

1. Critical Thinking – We learn more and develop better clash by thinking of plans in the context of specific topics rather than generalizing interps. Nebel[[4]](#footnote-4)

Second, my view is not that plans are bad. On the contrary, I think that plans are good, but only when they affirm the resolution. Whether some plan affirms their resolution (i.e., whether it is topical) is a function of the resolution’s semantics. To repeat, I have nothing against plans in general, and I believe that specification of some resolutional parameter may be permissible, if not obligatory, on many topics. One of the great things about LD is that our resolutions are diverse not only in their subject matter but also in their structure. This requires debaters to analyze each resolution with a fresh eye and not simply to import concepts and assumptions that may have applied to old resolutions into theoretical norms for each new one. But when the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. It is easier to continue with the same assumptions, as long as they are sufficiently shared by one’s peers on the national circuit, rather than reinventing the theoretical wheel every two months. It is important to resist this temptation and not to ignore the meaning of the resolution, even and especially if you may be more comfortable debating a different resolution.

1. Substantive Engagement
2. Under country spec affs have thousands of plan options, hugely skewing research against the neg. Smart negatives know they’ll be behind on any particular country debate and so invest in generics and uplayering. This regress of clash avoidance can only be stopped with predictable limits which my interp has.
3. Even if we know about governments we know comparatively more about the general literature on implementation, so there’s more depth under my interpretation.
4. Ground – Country specific plans destroy the negative’s ability to engage the aff because its impossible for me to have DA’s/CP’s with solvency advocates specific to every country you can defend, which denies me reliable access to core prep.
5. Topic Lit – The living wage is a municipal policy – thus defending the living wage on a national level ignores the core clash in the literature. Neumark and Adams[[5]](#footnote-5) further

Living wage ordinances typically mandate that businesses under contract with a city or, in some cases, receiving assistance from a city, must pay their workers a wage sufficient to support a family financially.

1. Uniqueness – We’ve had tons of specific aff’s this year so even if there’s value to country specific education its already been achieved. This topic is a unique opportunity to focus on other implementation mechanisms and elements of an advocacy.

Semantics First JL

And Semantic justifications like grammar have logical priority to pragmatics. A pragmatic approach could say “I’ll give you a million dollars if bachelors are married.” Even though you want the money, the pragmatic approach only offers a reason to want the statement to be true, not an actual reason for it to be true.

1. semantics have intuitive priority. Adhere to intuition because it’s unfair for debate to be count-intuitive.
   1. Semantic justifications have logical priority. For example the semantic approach would say the statement “bachelors are married” is false. But a pragmatic approach could say “I’ll give you a million dollars if bachelors are married.” Even though you may want the million dollars, all the pragmatic approach offers you are a reasons to want the interpretation to be true, not an actual reason for it to be true.
2. Semantics preserve substantive engagement and deter abusive strategies. Deprioritizing semantics permits never-ending debates on the marginal benefits of an interpretation –
3. Semantics control the internal link into topic literature because they frame how authors understand topical discussion. Thus a pre-requisite for any ground is the correct semantical interpretation.
4. Semantics prevent frivolous theory debate because we can always argue about marginal benefits of one interpretation, but there is only one true way to interpret the meaning of the resolution.
5. Semantics control the internal link into predictability. We prepare to debate the topic rather than for each pragmatic interpretation preferred on an arbitrary basis. Thus even if there is better ground under your interp, that doesn’t matter because no one will be prepared to debate it.
6. Topicality is a question of jurisdiction – what arguments count as offensive under the resolution. Semantics outweigh because they are the only type of argument that address the true scope of the topic, pragmatics only speak to how we arbitrarily limit it further.
7. Pragmatic debates are ultimately irresolvable and unverifiable, there’s no metric to determine how much lit/ground is lost under any interp. Prefer semantics because we can use definitions, metrics like how many times an article has been cited, and credentials to move towards an objectively true understanding of the topic.
8. Logical consistency – It doesn’t matter how good debate looks under your world if your interp can’t prove the truth of the resolution. Nebel[[6]](#footnote-6)

Let me make three caveats before defending my view. First, my view is not that pragmatic reasons are completely irrelevant to resolutional interpretation. I think, rather, that they should be lexically inferior to semantic reasons. (Think of the priority of basic liberties over equality in Rawls’s conception of justice.) Pragmatic considerations cannot justify interpretations that are ruled out on semantic grounds. If the resolution does not mean X, then it doesn’t matter how much better it would be to debate X. But if the resolution might mean either X or Y, then the topicality debate can come down to pragmatic considerations. But note that the debate between “competing interpretations” and “reasonability” is relevant here: if the resolution is truly ambiguous between X and Y, then even if X does better than Y on pragmatic grounds, the affirmative might have the right to select a reasonable but suboptimal interpretation. But this question does not, I think, affect the priority of semantic considerations.

1. Pragmatic benefits are lexically prior to semantics – two warrants. Nebel[[7]](#footnote-7) – brackets for efficiency

One way admits that such pragmatic considerations are relevant—i.e., they are reasons to change the topic—but holds that they are outweighed by the reasons for the topicality rule. [first] It would be better if everyone debated the resolution as worded, whatever it is, than if everyone debated whatever subtle variation on the resolution they favored. Affirmatives would unfairly abuse (and have already abused) the entitlement to choose their own unpredictable adventure, and negatives would respond (and have already responded) with strategies that are designed to avoid clash—including an essentially vigilantist approach to topicality in which debaters enforce their own pet resolutions on an arbitrary, round-by-round basis. Think here of the utilitarian case for internalizing rules against lying, murder, and other intuitively wrong acts. As the great utilitarian Henry Sidgwick argued, wellbeing is maximized not by everyone doing what they think maximizes wellbeing, but rather (in general) by people sticking to the rules of common sense morality. Otherwise, people are more likely to act on mistaken utility calculations and engage in self-serving violations of useful rules, thereby undermining social practices that promote wellbeing in the long run. That is exactly what happens if we reject the topicality rule in favor of direct appeals to pragmatic considerations. Sticking to a rule that applies regardless of the topic, of the debaters’ preferred variations on the topic, and of debaters’ familiarity with the national circuit’s flavor of the week, avoids these problems. A second strategy denies that such pragmatic benefits are relevant. This strategy is more deontological. One version of this strategy appeals to the importance of consent or agreement. Suppose that you give your opponents prior notice that you’ll be affirming the September/October 2012 resolution instead of the current one. There is a sense in which your affirmation of that resolution is now predictable: your opponents know, or are in a position to know, what you will be defending. And suppose that the older resolution is conducive to better (i.e., more fair and more educational) debate. Still, it’s unfair of you to expect your opponents to follow suit. Why? Because they didn’t agree to debate that topic. They registered for a tournament whose invitation specified the current resolution, not the Sept/Oct 2012 resolution or a free-for-all. The “social contract” argument for topicality holds that accepting a tournament invitation constitutes implicit consent to debate the specified topic. This claim might be contested, depending on what constitutes implicit consent. What is less contestable is this: given that some proposition must be debated in each round and that the tournament has specified a resolution, no one can reasonably reject a principle that requires everyone to debate the announced resolution as worded. This appeals to Scanlon’s contractualism. Someone who wishes to debate only the announced resolution has a strong claim against changing the topic, and no one has a stronger claim against debating the announced resolution (ignoring, for now, some possible exceptions to be discussed in the next subsection). So it is unfair to expect your opponent to debate anything other than the announced resolution. This unfairness is a constraint on the pursuit of education or other goods: it wrongs and is unjustifiable to your opponent.

1. No brightline when we prioritize pragmatics – your world creates arbitrary rules. Nebel[[8]](#footnote-8)

Here is a third kind of response to the view that we should directly appeal to pragmatic considerations when evaluating topicality. This view justifies debating propositions that are completely irrelevant to the resolution but are much better to debate. Once you say that pragmatic benefits can justify debating a proposition that isn’t really what the resolution means, or that the resolution means whatever it would be best for it to mean, there is no principled way of requiring any particular threshold of similarity in order to be an eligible interpretation of the resolution. This means that the pragmatic approach justifies affirmatives that have nothing to do with the resolution. Of course some see no problem with nontopical affirmatives whose impacts outweigh the reasons to debate the resolution. But suppose you want a principled response to such strategies. You have one if you take seriously the idea that the debate should be about the resolution, and the idea that the proposition expressed by the resolution is independent of what proposition would be best to debate. Without a commitment to debating the proposition that the resolution actually means, I don’t think there is a principled response to such strategies, as I discuss below.

Semantics first EL

1. Semantics have categorical priority on T. Accurately defined interpretations determine predictable ground. **Merrell 1[[9]](#footnote-9)**: **(this might be better off as an analytic)**

Why is it essential to accurately define the resolution? As Brownlee (1981) argued, “**for meaningful debate** to occur **both teams** **must share an understanding of the** focus of the **topic**.” However, **a shared understanding can only be achieved** pre-round **if both teams follow the same method of analysis when they consider the topic** during prep time **and** **seek to define the resolution as accurately as possible**. Thus, when the resolution is announced both teams have an obligation to consider the terms contained therein and prepare to debate the most accurate interpretation of the topic. **Because this is a mutual expectation** for each side, **the most accurately**-**defined** **interpretation** of the resolution therefore **becomes the only predictable** **interpretation** of the resolution. Given this process, two consequences automatically result whenever the affirmative plan fails to adhere to the most accurate definition of the topic: the negative loses access to predictable ground and topic-specific education is decreased. First, if the affirmative plan fails to comply with the most accurate interpretation of the topic then the negative team automatically loses access to predictable ground. The negative’s preparatory burden is to be able to argue against plans that fall within the scope of the topic. However, **expecting the neg**ative **to prepare against every possible interpretation of the resolution would pose an insurmountable burden** as there are myriad ways to define each term. Thus, the negative need only prepare to debate against plans that comply with the most accurate definition of the topic. **If the plan fails to adhere to the most accurate definition** of the resolution, the negative could not have been expected to predict the plan and thus **the predictable ground at the negative’s disposal has been decreased**.4 The loss of predictable ground is especially threatening in parli, because prep time is highly restricted and negative teams aren’t allowed to utilize research files or blocks to respond to un- predictable plans once the round has begun. Thus, definitional standards for topicality must be even more rigorously protected in parli than in other events.

Two impacts – (a) severe loss of predictable ground under their interpretation and in this round, (b) interpreting the resolution accurately is the ***only*** coherent basis for predictable ground. Debate is nonsensical without predictable ground so preserving its basis is constitutively necessary for the activity. Functions as a side constraint on theory since theory preserves the valuable parts of debate, but debate is meaningless without a basis for predictable ground.

2. Semantics first preserves clash and combats proliferation of abusive strategies - **Nebel 1**[[10]](#footnote-10):

One way admits that such pragmatic considerations are relevant—i.e., they are reasons to change the topic—but holds that they are outweighed by the reasons for the topicality rule. It would be better if everyone debated the resolution as worded, whatever it is, than if everyone debated whatever subtle variation on the resolution they favored. Affirmatives would unfairly abuse (and have already abused) the entitlement to choose their own unpredictable adventure, and negatives would respond (and have already responded) with strategies that are designed to avoid clash—including an essentially vigilantist approach to topicality in which debaters enforce their own pet resolutions on an arbitrary, round-by-round basis. Think here of the utilitarian case for internalizing rules against lying, murder, and other intuitively wrong acts. As the great utilitarian Henry Sidgwick argued, **wellbeing is maximized** not by everyone doing what they think maximizes wellbeing, but rather (in general) **by** people **sticking** **to** the **rules** of common sense morality. **Otherwise, people** are more likely to act on mistaken utility calculations and **engage in self-serving violations of useful rules**, thereby **undermining** social practices that promote **wellbeing in the long** **run**. **That is exactly what happens if we reject the topicality rule in favor of direct appeals to pragmatic considerations**. Sticking to a rule that applies regardless of the topic, of the debaters’ preferred variations on the topic, and of debaters’ familiarity with the national circuit’s flavor of the week, avoids these problems

Two impacts: (a) their interpretation proliferates avoidant and abusive strategies, (b) no recourse under their interpretation against these strategies. Without prioritizing semantics first self-serving violations of the topicality rule are de facto legitimate.

3. As a judge you do not have jurisdiction to vote on a non-topical case. The NFL-mandated topic is analogous to mandated speech times; they are both defining features of the activity. The judge should uphold debating the topic just as much as they would only evaluating arguments within speeches.

4. As a judge you hold us accountable to our tacit agreement to the tournament mandates. For example you would hold me to debate the side assigned to me by the pairing. If I debated the opposite side, you would not expect my opponent to switch sides and would vote against me for not upholding my side of the resolution. You should hold my opponent similarly accountable for their tacit agreement to debate the resolution per the tournament invitation. **Nebel 2**[[11]](#footnote-11):

A second strategy denies that such pragmatic benefits are relevant. This strategy is more deontological. One version of this strategy appeals to the importance of consent or agreement. **Suppose** that **you give your** **opponents** **prior notice that you’ll be affirming the September/October 2012 resolution instead of the current one. There is a sense in which your affirmation** of that resolution **is now predictable**: your opponents know, or are in a position to know, what you will be defending. **And suppose that** **the older resolution** is **conducive to better** (i.e., more fair and more educational) **debate**. **Still, it’s unfair** of you **to** **expect** **your** **opponents to follow suit**. Why? **Because they didn’t agree to debate that topic**. **They registered for a tournament whose invitation specified the current resolution**, not the Sept/Oct 2012 resolution or a free-for-all. The “social contract” argument for topicality holds that **accepting a tournament invitation constitutes implicit consent to debate the specified topic**. This claim might be contested, depending on what constitutes implicit consent. What is less contestable is this: **given that some proposition must be debated in each round and that the tournament has specified a resolution, no one can reasonably reject a principle that requires everyone to debate the announced resolution** as worded. This appeals to Scanlon’s contractualism. Someone who wishes to debate only the announced resolution has a strong claim against changing the topic, and no one has a stronger claim against debating the announced resolution (ignoring, for now, some possible exceptions to be discussed in the next subsection). So it is unfair to expect your opponent to debate anything other than the announced resolution. This unfairness is a constraint on the pursuit of education or other goods: it wrongs and is unjustifiable to your opponent.

5. Debate-based standards are ultimately irresolvable and unverifiable, there’s no metric to determine how much lit/ground is lost under any interp. Prefer semantics because we can use definitions, context, credentials, citations, and other metrics to move towards an accurate understanding of the topic. **Merrell 2[[12]](#footnote-12): (getting very sleepy… gonna be sloppy ab highlighting now)**

Second, **there are logical barriers that impede** the **evaluation of debate-based standards**. **Teams** often **claim that defining the resolution in a par- ticular way will serve to increase the overall qual- ity of debate** either by facilitating improved edu- cation or providing access to preferable ground. **However, it is impossible to determine whether de- bating about a different topic would actually pro- vide better ground or education**. **Debaters cannot hope to stipulate within the context of a round, nor can the judge seek to evaluate, all of the poten- tial combinations of arguments** that are **available to each side**, **much less to evaluate the distinctions in ground between two different interpretations of a topic**. Similarly, it is impossible to determine whether potential increases in education would be more or less desirable than the topical education that is forgone if the plan fails to be topical. **Judges cannot predict whether the alternative education is unique**, **whether the competitors have already been exposed to it, or whether the discussion of such an issue would actually occur** even **if the topic was altered** accordingly. **Given the substantial uncer- tainty inherent to speculations about potential topic alterations, debate-based standards are altogether too difficult to assess to yield guaranteed benefits**.

6. The immediate guaranteed abuse of a semantically non-topical interpretation outweighs its speculative debate benefits. **Merrell 3:**

Additionally, **even if altering the topic could the- oretically provide access to preferable ground or education, those benefits will not materialize in the current debate** round. Switching the topic without providing fair warning to both teams sacrifices pre- dictability, impedes preparation, and reduces the quality of clash. Moreover, **the non-topical ground and education that one team seeks cannot be used in the current debate because the issue of topicality has already subsumed the entire focus of the round** such that the new ground cannot be accessed and discussion has been diverted away from the issues that would provide additional education. Finally, resolutions change from round to round and thus a precedent for redefinition of the topic in the ad- vocated manner cannot be set for future rounds. Thus, **the immediate and guaranteed abuse that oc- curs as a result of reinterpreting the topic vastly outweighs speculative benefits that are unlikely to materialize.**

7. Semantics have intuitive priority. For example, someone who prioritized semantics would find the statement “bachelors are married” incoherent. But someone who prioritized pragmatic goals would be persuaded to believe that “bachelors are married” for a million dollars. Even though you may want the million dollars, all the pragmatic approach offers you are a reasons to want the interpretation to be true, not an actual reason for it to be true. Prefer intuitive interpretations since debaters will follow their intuitions until challenged otherwise – meaning lots of substantive rounds lost to topicality against intuition. Moreover, intuition is a tiebreaker on topicality.. not sure how to impact this…

Semantics weighing

All cards from Merrell**[[13]](#footnote-13)**

Limits/precision –

A specific definition may be preferred because it is more limited and therefore precise than any alternatives. For example, one definition of “de- velopment assistance” might be “any aid given by governments to support the economic, social, and political development of developing countries.” That definition, however, is quite broad. An al- ternative definition might only include “bilateral assistance between governments meant to address poverty within the recipient nation.” The second definition is more limiting and more specific, be- cause it only includes government-to-government aid that addresses poverty. Hence, a precise defi- nition may be better if it is more carefully sculpted and a more accurate description of the term in question. Precision is important because it facil- itates a nuanced understanding of the terms under discussion.7

Intent to define –

In casual circumstances words are often defined carelessly, without the explicit intention of defin- ing a term as accurately as possible. For example, a reporter might writing about terrorism might in- clude the casual explanation that “terrorism is the use of violence against non-combatants.” In most cases, such offhand claims have not been subject to careful consideration and are merely offered as a superficial explanation that will help the author’s immediate audience understand the fundamentals of the concept being conveyed. Alternatively, an academic journal article on terrorism might com- pare between a variety of definitions and conclude that the preferred definition is “the use or threat of violence in pursuance of political goals with an aim of influencing a broader audience than the vic- tims of the violence.” The article might also in- clude an explanation for why that specific set of characteristics has been chosen to comprise the definition. Legislation is another area in which definitions are often carefully crafted with intent to define the terms in specific ways. An “intent to define” is good because it indicates that the defi- nition was carefully crafted and is intended to be used in academia or policymaking.

Field Context / Term of Art

The field context standard proposes that litera- ture on the topic is focused in a specific way and that a particular definition supports that focus. For example, in some regions “capital punishment” doesn’t necessarily refer to the death penalty be- cause those countries do not execute criminals. In- stead, it might refer to a fiduciary penalty (i.e., a fine on “capital”). However, if the resolution was “The United States Federal Government should promote human rights in the criminal justice sys- tem by banning capital punishment,” then the de- baters should acknowledge that in the context of a discussion about the United States and the criminal justice system capital punishment refers to the exe- cution of criminals. Similarly, if the resolution was “The United States Federal Government should pass the Health Care Bill,” and a particular health care bill is currently being debated in Congress, then the phrase “the Health Care Bill” within the resolution can most accurately be defined as a term of art referring to the current piece of legislation, even though hundreds of other health care bills have been proposed in the past.

1. <http://vbriefly.com/2014/12/19/jake-nebel-on-specifying-just-governments/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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3. Generics, Sarah-Jane Leslie - http://www.princeton.edu/~sjleslie/RoutledgeHandbookEntryGenerics.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Priority of Resolutional Semantics, Jake Nebel, February 2015 http://vbriefly.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/thepriorityofresolutionalsemantics1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Do Living Wage Ordinances Reduce Urban Poverty? David Neumark Scott Adams ISSN 022-166X  2003 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System THE JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCES • XXXVIII [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Priority of Resolutional Semantics, Jake Nebel, February 2015 http://vbriefly.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/thepriorityofresolutionalsemantics1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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9. Brandon Merrell 2015. Back to its roots – accuracy as a litmus test for topicality standards [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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12. Brandon Merrell 2015. Back to its roots – accuracy as a litmus test for topicality standards [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Brandon Merrell 2015. Back to its roots – accuracy as a litmus test for topicality standards [↑](#footnote-ref-13)